

[Sarah Norman]

July 10, 1939

Miss Alice Nashburn [?]

923 Pendleton St.,

Aiken, S. C.

Retired office secretary

A. S. Long, writer.

Brevard, N. C.

SARAH NORMAN: SPINSTER Original Names Changed Names

Miss Alice Nashburn Sarah Norman

Whiteside Cove, N. C. Smokeridge Cove

Aiken, S. C. Ellery C9- N.C. Box 2

SARAH NORMAN: SPINSTER

Sarah Norman is past seventy; tall and thin and nervously somewhat jittery. She talks more easily than she does anything else.

"I was born and spent my early life in New England, but I have lived in the South for the last fifty odd years. My Southern friends tell me I am now a Southerner, but I insist I am still a Yankee. My family landed on New England soil in 1630; that makes me a pretty

Library of Congress

good Yankee. It will surprise some to know I am a Democrat, and a great admirer of President Roosevelt, and my father was a Democrat before me. Today one of my brothers is a strong supporter of the President and the other brother bites himself whenever Mr. Roosevelt's name is mentioned. Fortunately we all live apart, a long range quarrel over politics doesn't break much glass. Hot letters written in Philadelphia cool off considerable by the time they reach Charleston.

"You know we Northern Democrats were called Copperheads during the War of 1861, but my father was a colonel in the Union army. One of his Democratic friends was greatly displeased with him because he volunteered. But there were plenty of Democrats who wore the blue: McClellan, 2 Hancock, Rosecrans, and many others. Grant himself was a Democrat before the war, but Grant was pure soldier. You will wonder how I happen to know about those things. Well, I lived with my father until his death and I often heard him talk with old soldiers. That is the way I've got everything I know, and that is not much.

I never liked to study when I was in school and I've never read anything but newspapers and popular novels. The only reason I read these novels is because I hear people talking about them; I want to be able to enter into the conversation. As devoted as I am to my church I rarely read my church paper. I have blushed at my ignorance when somebody asked me what a suffragan bishop is and what is meant by the rubrics of the church. But next to my immediate family, I am more interested in my church than I am in anything else in the world. I guess I inherited my church along with my hair and eyes. Once a revivalist asked as if I were a Christian. I replied, 'No, I'm a hard-boiled Episcopalian, and not open to conversion.

Next to my family and church, I am interested in gossip; not malicious but humorous gossip. So you see what a wonderful life I live. The shadows that fall across the world touch me lightly and the gusty passions of men and women interest me but do not stir me greatly.

Library of Congress

I only watch the game from the bleachers. I've always been glad I never married and had children. I'd hate to be the mother of some of these girls that go along the streets half naked. There is one prophecy in the Old Testament that has certainly come true. I don't remember where this prophecy is recorded, but it was recently cited by one of our bishops. 'They shall go along the streets naked and shall not be ashamed.' I'll take the bishop's word for it. I don't remember very much of my Bible, and my eyesight is now so poor I can't read much. Anyhow, after reading in the newspapers of the divorce entanglements of the present day, I do not care to review the troubles of Solomon with his wives. And, after all, I can get as much spiritual nourishment from my church as I can absorb, without bothering my need with ancient Hebrew things that I can't understand. I don't think there are many people intelligent enough to understand the Bible, and this includes some of the preachers.

"Why did I come South? Primarily for my father's health. He had weak lungs. I don't believe he ever got over the hardships of campaigning while he was in the army. He inherited a little money, made a little more before he retired from business, and received a government pension. Altogether he had enough to live on in a simple way. Both of his wives died, and I, 4 his only daughter, travelled with him and lived with him wherever he made a stop. The first home we established in the South was in the small town of Ellery in the pine barrens of South Carolina. This region is put down on the oldest maps as "the Saluda Desert." This desert has not yet been made to bloom as the rose, but it does grow cotton and truck and peaches and berries on the uplands and corn in the creek bottoms.

"The drowsy old county town of Ellery took on new life when rich men from New York found the air soft in winter and the early spring gorgeous with dogwood and wistaria. They came down with their pole ponies and race horses, and some of them raised the devil generally when they were not riding horses.

"We liked the place and the people so much, and the air seemed to do father so much good, that we bought a house and settled down. My brother came also and bought a

Library of Congress

weekly newspaper, which he conducted for several years. I spent a part of my time in his office and gathered social items for his paper. When I started, I must have been the dumbest thing that ever worked in an office. My brother once asked me to report a church meeting. When I got back he asked me what happened. I told him I saw the handsomest man there I had ever seen in my life.

5

"'Huh', he grunted. 'The only thing you saw there was a handsome guy. As a reporter you are a wonder.'

"But I did learn to do better than this. Among other things I learned typing, which came in handy when I got a job in the office of a power company, which I held for several years until the company passed into other hands. This office work was a benefit to me in several ways. I have always been timid and nervous, and it did me good to rub elbows with people in the office and learn to give and take. It helped to break the crust of my New England reserve.

"The summers in Ellery were long and hot, so we spent the heated days in Western North Carolina at Smokeridge Cove. To get there in those days we had to go by rail as far as the train would carry us and then by hack over one of the roughest roads ever travelled by human beings. Once the hack broke down and we had to spend the night in a wayside cabin. This road had always been rough, hacks had always broken down, and such seemed to be the foreordained way of life. Anyhow nobody ever did anything about it. If some of the old-timers were alive now, and could travel over the modern highway, they'd think they were in a new and miraculous world.

"In Smokeridge Cove we boarded with an English 6 family of means who had drifted in here several years before and bought hundreds of acres of land. They were probably looking for a milder climate and for that seclusion so dear to the Englishman's heart. Well, they got the seclusion all right. I think they took us in for company more than for anything

Library of Congress

else, and they wouldn't have taken us in at all if we hadn't brought letters of introduction. They raised many sheep and hogs and fowls, and it was easier and more profitable to use these to feed boarders than to drive them, as was then the custom, to a distant market town. Peacocks were kept as landscape decorations and to lend dignity to the manor. The peafowl flock was kept thinned out by foxes. We spent many happy summers here and came to be looked upon almost as members of the family. We shared their joys and their sorrows. We even spent one whole winter there because the air seemed to be good for father. We occupied a comfortable log cabin in the corner of the yard and fixed it up to suit ourselves. We plastered the inside walls with sheets of an illustrated English magazine called the GRAPHIC, and we named our cabin the Graphic. If our walls had been covered with pictures such as appear in our modern magazines, the cabin would probably have been regarded as a museum devoted to the nude, and it might have been named the Inferno. We usually spent the evenings in the 7 main house with the family. My father and our host sometimes sipped hot toddy. On going to our cabin one evening with our lantern, we discovered a big rattlesnake in our pathway. Ugh! It makes me shiver now to think about it.

“Our host sent his sons off to school and one of them became a successful country doctor in a neighboring county. Another son settled near his father and gave his time to farming. He married and became the father of a large family, mostly girls. When an epidemic of diphtheria broke out in this settlement, five of his little daughters died of the disease. They went down like ninepins, one after the other. They were buried in the little Episcopalian cemetery nearby. This small church had been built under the sponsorship of two rich maiden ladies who spent their summers here. I went with them to the cemetery to pick out a spot for the little graves. It was pitiful. I took the youngest girl to our cabin in the hope she might escape the disease, but I heard her choke in the night and ran for the doctor. She followed her sisters to the cemetery. A little negro girl who helped with the nursing contracted the disease but recovered. I myself had what was called sympathetic sore throat, but I was tough enough to shake it off.

Library of Congress

"Such scourges were then regarded as the dispensation of an inscrutable Providence, and they were borne with 8 what resignation people could summon. Preachers sometimes exhorted their congregations to give up their sins in order to escape the wrath of an angry God. Fifty years ago not much was known about germs and sanitation and nothing at all about serums. So the five little girls choked to death and were laid side by side in a row.

"Religion took some queer turns in that earlier day. One time a little girl of an Episcopalian family attended revival services in a neighboring church. Our little rector was sent there to "rescue" her and bring her home. He walked up the aisle and found her kneeling at the mourners' bench. When he gently persuaded her to come away with him, the congregation instantly became an angry mob and threatened the safety of the rector, crying out, 'Yonder goes the devil in man's clothes.' The rector was saved from harm by a friend who locked the church door and checked the mob for a moment, thus giving the rector a chance to escape to a friendly house. Later he was spirited away from the neighborhood until the excitement died down.

"On the whole, life at Smokeridge was pleasant. The food and air were excellent and the people interesting. Our elderly English Host was an individualist, as may be guessed. For one thing, he insisted on having what he called apple tarts on the table every day of the year.

9

In the American lingo they were plain apple pies. The trout fishing almost at our door was fine, and I enjoyed the horseback riding more than anything else. A stalwart mountain man with a fierce red mustache, and mounted on a splendid horse, used to go riding with me sometimes, but not often, for I did not wish to encourage his attentions. When he came to call, he rapped on the side of the house with his riding whip instead of knocking at the front door.

Library of Congress

"After my father died, I went back to Ellery to live alone in my house, which father had left to me. My brother drifted back up North and married there and settled down. He drives down to see me once in a great while. After I had lost my job with the power company, I did not find it very easy to get along financially. Sometimes I leased my furnished house in winter to people from the North and then rented one room for myself somewhere in town and did my own cooking. When I couldn't lease my house to advantage I lived in it myself. I am doing that now, but find it a little lonesome. I have made many friends during my long residence in the town, and they are more than good to me. They ask me out to dinner, they send in delicacies, and they take me out in their automobiles. I get much pleasure out of my church and its activities. I do not read much because of my weakened eyesight, but then, I never did read much except newspapers. After I 9 In the American lingo they were plain apple pies. The trout fishing almost at our door was fine, and I enjoyed the horseback riding more than anything else. A stalwart mountain man with a fierce red mustache, and mounted on a splendid horse, used to go riding with me sometimes, but not often, for I did not wish to encourage his attentions. When he came to call, he rapped on the side of the house with his riding whip instead of knocking at the front door.

"After my father died, I went back to Ellery to live alone in my house, which father had left to me. My brother drifted back up North and married there and settled down. He drives down to see me once in a great while. After I had lost my job with the power company, I did not find it very easy to get along financially. Sometimes I leased my furnished house in winter to people from the North and then rented one room for myself somewhere in town and did my own cooking. When I couldn't lease my house to advantage I lived in it myself. I am doing that now, but find it a little lonesome. I have made many friends during my long residence in the town, and they are more than good to me. They ask me out to dinner, they send in delicacies, and they take me out in their automobiles. I get much pleasure out of my church and its activities. I do not read much because of my weakened eyesight, but then, I never did read much except newspapers. After I 10 have read the screaming

Library of Congress

headlines, I know more than I want to know. I just love President Roosevelt and I get spittin' mad at the nasty things they say about him.

"I still manage to spend my summers in Western North Carolina. Friends take me up and bring me back in their automobiles. I do not go to Smokeridge Cove any more; I am no longer able to ride horseback and climb mountains. I go to a small town where everything is in easy reach by walking. I rent a room and get my own suppers and breakfasts over an electric grill; I go to a boarding house for my dinners. Altogether, I regard my life as fortunate. I suffer somewhat from nerves, but nerves are a part of original sin. They are a part of the common lot. I have one incurable disease, old age. That again is a part of the common lot and a thing not to be complained about. In the Fall I am going back to my house in Ellery, and when it comes my time to cross over the line, I expect to be buried there, where I have spent so many happy years.